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Angry Attacks on America

Khomeini's tirades spur outbreaks of mob hysteria—and bloodshed

The rancorous quarrel between the U.S. and Iran darkened and expanded last week into an ever more perilous confrontation. From the U.S. came a warning of military force, from Iran an appeal to mob violence. Such violence broke out from Turkey to India, most seriously in Pakistan, where the first American blood was shed. And by this time Iran's fire-eating Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini had become so extreme, so demagogic, so streaked with irrationality that serious diplomats wondered how the breach could be repaired. "This is not a struggle between the United States and Iran," Khomeini declared. "It is a struggle between Islam and the infidels." He repeatedly threatened that the 49 American hostages held in the captured U.S. embassy in Tehran would be tried as spies, and possibly executed, if the U.S. does not send back the deposed Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi from the hospital in New York City.

The White House, supported by widespread American indignation against the Iranians, responded with a warning that "the consequences of harm to any single hostage will be extremely grave." President Carter backed up that warning by ordering the 80,000-ton carrier *Kitty Hawk* and five escorting warships to speed from Subic Bay in the Philippines to reinforce the carrier *Midway* and twelve other ships already in the Persian Gulf area. Until last week, the White House had emphatically ruled out all talk of using military force against Iran; now it just as emphatically warned that while it was seeking a peaceful settlement it had "other remedies available."

"Why should we be afraid?" jeered Khomeini. "We consider martyrdom a great honor."

Khomeini's inflammatory rhetoric played a major part in the wave of Muslim fanaticism and anti-American violence that swept far beyond Iran. In Saudi Arabia, possessor of the world's greatest reserves of oil and American dollars, a band of extreme religious zealots seized the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, the holiest shrine in all Islam (*see* WORLD). In Pakistan, a mob enraged by radio reports claiming that the U.S. had inspired the attack on the Mecca mosque stormed and set fire to the U.S. embassy. They left the modernistic, 30-acre compound a gutted ruin. Two Americans were killed; 90 others were rescued after seven hours of horror *(see following pages)*. Angry crowds also threw rocks through the windows of a U.S. consulate in Izmir, Turkey; another crowd chanted "Down with American imperialism!" outside the American embassy in Dacca, Bangladesh; demonstrators in Calcutta stoned the U.S. consulate and burned President Carter in effigy. Khomeini's reaction to the embassy attack in Pakistan was "great joy" and a call for all Muslims to join in an uprising against Western influence.

Indeed, even while the Pakistani attack was going on, Khomeini's office made a statement over Iranian radio blaming the Mecca violence on "criminal U.S. imperialism." It added: "The Muslims must . . . expect this kind of dirty act by American imperialism and international Zionism." There was not a shred of evidence for the accusation, and U.S. State Department Spokesman Hodding Carter promptly described it as an "outright, knowing lie." Indeed, the assailants were fundamentalist Muslims whose opposition to all Western influence is similar to Khomeini's archaic views. But though the U.S. has no quarrel with Islam, the report of U.S. complicity was widely believed in Islamic countries.

For the U.S. the immediate issue remained the 49 hostages in Tehran. Concern about their fate far overshadowed any relief about the return of the 13 hostages—five white women and eight black men—who were freed by their captors and who made it home for Thanksgiving dinner. As the 13 stepped off the C-135 military jet that brought them into Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, dozens of relatives who had been flown there from all over the country rushed to embrace them. But the official welcoming could not be jubilant. Said Secretary of State Cyrus Vance: "Our relief that you are safe is muted by our concern for your colleagues who remain." A day later, White House Press Spokesman Jody Powell announced after Carter conferred with his top aides at Camp David: "The last American hostage is just as important to us as the first."

Khomeini's original threat against the 49 was conditional: "If Carter does not return the Shah, it is possible that the hostages may be put on trial," but his intentions seemed clear. The prisoners, Khomeini said, were not diplomats but people "whose acts of espionage have been proved on the basis of evidence." If the hostages are tried, he added, "Carter knows what will happen." Iran's Deputy Chief Islamic Prosecutor Hassan Ghaffarpour was explicit. If the hostages are found guilty of espionage, he said, they would be "executed by firing squad."

The trials presumably would be held before an Islamic revolutionary court. Like many other acts in the Muslim world, the proceedings there begin with a prayer: "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful." But compassion and mercy have scarcely been noticeable in Iran's revolutionary trials. They are often held at night, and the accused have never yet been represented by a defense attorney. They may speak in their own behalf, but members of the audience also may, and frequently do, step forward to add accusations of their own to those presented by the prosecutor. When the sentence of death is pronounced, as it has been this year against more than 600 Iranians accused as officials and agents of the Shah, it is usually carried out within hours.

It is possible that any Americans found guilty would be sentenced to prison rather than executed, or perhaps simply expelled. But the chances are that only some lower-level employees would be acquitted. To Western reporters, Deputy Prosecutor Ghaffarpour last week defined espionage as "the gathering of information for use in hostile operations, military, economic, political and psychological, etc., against the Islamic community." That is broad enough to cover nearly all the intelligence-gathering functions that just about every major embassy in the world carries out.

The students holding the Tehran embassy last week provided some ominous indications of the kind of "evidence" that might be produced against the Americans. In a courtyard decorated with portraits of Khomeini, students chanting *"Allahu Akbar!"* (God is great!) publicly interrogated in two groups the 13 hostages

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